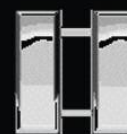


Company Command

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

Managing a Forward Operating Base

By Capt. Tad S. Reed

O.K., Ranger, you are a commander about to deploy, and you have been tasked with managing a forward operating base. This article's intent is to give you a basic guideline for the preparation, assessment and execution of your mission.

Although the majority of small forward operating bases (FOBs) in Afghanistan will be closed by the end of 2014, this mission may arise elsewhere in the world in the near future. This article assumes that you are falling in on an existing FOB. Building an FOB would be another article altogether.

It is likely that you have no training in FOB management and you are looking frantically for resources. I was once in your position. I learned by experience while managing FOB Gardez as a company commander during Operation Enduring Freedom XIV, from April–November 2013. One good resource I used was *Joint Forward Operations Base (JFOB) Protection Handbook (Graphic Training Aid 90-01-011)*, which focuses almost entirely on protection and defense. My team never found an all-encompassing FOB-management handbook that addresses force protection, logistics, public works, entry control point (ECP) operations and foreign security-guard utilization, so we put this article together. Our hope is that you learn from our experience, add your own experi-

ence and pass on our combined knowledge to the next generations of leaders who are tasked to operate FOBs.

Preparation

Make early contact with the leaders you will replace. Seek them out if they have not contacted you. You will likely have difficulty with high-side secure communications with the forward unit, but you should be able to receive a basic troops to task analysis from the forward unit to assist you in conducting your company's initial mission analysis. Critical to your decisionmaking on how to distribute your Soldiers will be your unit's force manning level (FML), also known as your unit's force cap.

Once you have the forward unit's troops to task and compare it to your FML, you may recognize a need for adjustments. If possible, send a representative on the pre-deployment site survey to determine recommended troops to task by the FML for your own element.

Assess the contracts that the FOB holds. The majority of FOB contracts are unclassified. It is feasible to request copies of them from the forward unit for analysis prior to deployment.

Pick your team wisely. Select officers and NCOs who are able to operate independently and who will ruthlessly enforce standards, policies and procedures. Training the following tasks prior to deployment will save you headaches downrange:

- Qualify every Soldier on every weapons system that will be utilized in FOB defense, to include but not



A sergeant of the guard instructs soldiers before they move to their guard posts to provide security at their forward operating base.



*Left: Soldiers assist a mock wounded noncombatant during a mass-casualty rehearsal.
Right: An 'injured' soldier is helped into a vehicle for evacuation during the exercise.*



limited to: M9, M4, M249, M240, M2 .50-caliber, shotgun, M203 and/or M320, the Common Remotely Operated Weapons Station, and less-than-lethal munitions.

- Train every soldier on your company/battalion's standard operating procedures (SOPs) for signal and communications as well as on the use of the equipment/items.

- Ensure that every soldier is Combat Lifesaver-qualified.

- Ensure that there is redundancy built into your certifications for contracting officers and NCOs, who may be reassigned to other duties during the deployment.

- Conduct escalation of force training repeatedly.

- Conduct rules of engagement training. Give clear and concise guidance in writing to the subordinates that you will assign the tasks of mayor, base defense operations center (BDOC) and ECP officer in charge/NCO in charge.

Assessment

Security. Immediately upon arrival, assess guard positions, manned tower positions, vehicle positions, fallback positions, the ECP, bunkers, casualty collection points and the

Capt. Tad S. Reed is aide-de-camp to the commanding general, 101st Airborne Division. Previously, he commanded rifle and headquarters companies in the 101st Airborne Division and led mechanized Infantry and mortar platoons in the 3rd Infantry Division, and he has served in combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. An elementary school teacher on Sept. 11, 2001, Reed enlisted as an Army Infantryman and was commissioned through Officer Candidate School in 2006. He holds a master's degree in educational technology from National Louis University.

force protection patrol matrix. Not all gaps in security identified by the BDOC need to be filled by more U.S. Soldiers. Afghan security guards were essential to our base-defense plan. An incoming unit must assess the local-national security guards' loyalty, competence and level of involvement in FOB defense.

Ensure that existing policies are actually being enforced. Review each of the specified procedures, sections, and annexes or appendices. The SOPs must be accessible to every element on the FOB; use a unit portal page or shared drive. During the relief-in-place process, request that the departing unit conduct base-defense/mass-casualty drills as many times as necessary for you to assess all aspects of the defense. Incorporate your leaders as necessary to make their own assessments.

Assess unit assignments, reaction times, primary and alternate fighting positions, stand-off guard positions, vehicle emplacement at the ECP (to survive a vehicle-borne IED at the ECP), local-national security-guard interactions (how do they communicate with other forces?), casualty collection and movement to the designated aid station, reporting procedures, and related tactical operations center battle drills. Capture what must be changed or added immediately to the SOPs.

The ECP SOP should include vehicle and personnel entry and exit search procedures; Biometric Automated Toolset/Handheld Interagency Identity Detection Equipment or Secure Electronic Enrollment Kit procedures; tracking procedures for personnel and vehicles; monitoring and tracking of movement control team arrival reports (which list what large local-national trucks to expect in a 24-hour period); badge issuing; designated guard positions to include canine assets;

maintenance schedules for each of the barriers and surveillance equipment; a schedule for fueling; a schedule for interpreters; and posted FOB-access rules in the relevant local/native languages and with caricatures or pictures (local literacy rates must always be a consideration).

The BDOC and contracting team should also closely review any active security-guard contracts. When we arrived at our FOB, the Afghan security guards were manning only three guard towers. After a close reading of the contract, we were able to increase their manning to 10 guard positions, including additional guards at the ECP, where they assisted in searching personnel and vehicles.

Along with FOB-defense manning requirements, the BDOC is responsible for physical defensive assets like weapons systems, surveillance equipment, guard towers and barriers. Assuming the enemy will attack, where do you want him to attack? How do you shape his actions and layer your defenses from there? Utilize the fundamentals of Field Manual 3-21.8, Chapter 8, Section IV, "Engagement Area Development," 8-68, as you seek to make continual improvements. Consider the nonlethal engagement area of the FOB. The majority of contact with the enemy may actually occur inside your FOB's perimeter. Plan for it.

An initial assessment should consider dead space around the FOB; obstacles and barriers; friendly and enemy observation and fields of fire; avenues of approach; the locations of guard towers; and sectors of fire of weapons systems. The BDOC should constantly assess, improve, adjust and rehearse the defense plan. Ensure that surveillance equipment is fully mission-capable at all times, and emplace useful assets like the Expendable Unattended Ground Sensor to monitor dead space.

Service contracts. An essential first step for an incoming unit is to determine which services can be met by the unit and which must be met by local-national contracts (without risking the security of the FOB). Talk with the outgoing units and mayor's cell. Extraneous contracts should be terminated immediately. Gaps that need filling should be identified and addressed. Applications for renewing or starting new contracts can take as long as 45 days, so there's no time to wait.

During our transition, we saw problems with contractors: Septic tanks overflowed, trash was piled high, portable toilets stank, and water tanks ran dry. The solution was simple: We refused the employees exit from the FOB until they completed their work, we demanded better service from the supervisors, and we exchanged emails and

Checklist for Assessing FOB Defenses

- Does the FOB have defense in depth?
- Assess the surveillance overlays.
- Assess the force-protection/mass-casualty battle drills.
- Assess policies/procedures related to access.
- Review the tactical operations center battle drills of the parent unit of the FOB.
- Walk the perimeter (interior and exterior) to assess any gaps in coverage and points of vulnerability.
- Assess range cards. They should be panoramic photographs, if possible, and should cover both the exterior and interior of the FOB.
- Assess guard-mount procedures.
- Assess the local-national security guards. Are they manning positions with weapons, scanning sectors? Do they have radios, binoculars and night-vision capability?
- Assess weapons maintenance.
- Assess other force-protection equipment.
- Review maintenance schedules and procedures for all weapons and force-protection equipment, to include power generation.
- Assess force projection and posture. How does the enemy see our FOB? Our Soldiers? Our Afghan security guards?
- Assess obstacles outside of the perimeter, at the ECP, on/around the airfield or helicopter landing zone, and interior to the FOB.
- Assess the FOB-defense fires plan.
- What system is used for informing the FOB of impending or current attack or threat? Is it functioning, and does

everyone know its brevity codes?

- Assess the knowledge of brevity codes and FOB-defense plans around the FOB. Poll Soldiers, civilians and local-national security guards about the plan and what their respective roles are in it.
- Review the local-national security guards' contract. How many guards are required? What are the number/type of positions they are contracted to man? What are their limitations? They generally have no authority outside of the FOB, by law. What are their privileges? Are they authorized cellphones, dining facility access? Most importantly, are they authorized to carry weapons on the FOB, or must their weapons be kept in guard positions?
- Assess the relationship and situation concerning the host-nation security forces. Are they tied into your defense? How do you communicate when needed? What are their battle drills?
- Assess medical evacuation procedures, times and locations.
- Review and be familiar with policies for dealing with wounded or ill host-nation security force personnel, local nationals and contractors, to include U.S. contractors.
- Assess local force-protection patrolling. Are they patrolling with a task and purpose based on priority intelligence requirements? Is the unit tracking the patrols by time and route on a combined overlay and producing a heat map of their routes to avoid pattern setting? Are patrols coordinated with adjacent units? Are these patrols included in the unit synchronization matrix?

Remotely operated video cameras afford the Base Defense Operations Center with real-time surveillance of key terrain such as the base's entry control point.

phone calls with the contractors.

After those first few intense days, weekly inspections and spot corrections were generally sufficient. U.S. escorts provided additional quality assurance. Soldiers were tasked to escort contracted employees during their work on the FOB to monitor their performance and maintain security. Under the watchful eye of Soldier escorts, contractors' performance improved dramatically.

The contracts that require frequent access to and from the FOB are serious security concerns. On our FOB, for example, local Afghan contractors removed black water, gray water and trash. The locations where those materials were disposed were kilometers from the FOB, although visible by the Persistent Threat Detection System. The contractors' low-volume collection vehicles had to enter and exit the FOB several times each day to be able to keep up with demand. To mitigate the risks that these contracts incurred, we established an extensive tracking system for these vehicles and contractors, and we implemented additional redundant search procedures.

Execution

Security. The BDOC is responsible for conducting FOB defense drills that train Soldiers, contracted security guards and contracted civilians to respond effectively to mass-casualty situations, indirect fire, direct fire, perimeter breaches and insider threats. The only way to ensure that the FOB is prepared for an emergency is to rehearse the response to that situation, incorporating everyone. Be cognizant of who is observing your reactions during drills, such as local nationals who work on the FOB who reside elsewhere or even children watching from outside the ECP.

As a natural breach in your FOB perimeter, the ECP will likely be intensely reconnoitered by the enemy. Because of this, the ECP should be a primary focus of base defense operations. Always consider a defense in depth. Build redundancy into your obstacles and surveillance capabilities. When one capability fails, another will prevent a catastrophe. Stay inside your enemy's decision cycle (or observe, orient, decide and act loop) by constantly improving and varying your defenses. Utilize your robots (such as the Small Unmanned Ground Vehicle) in your search procedures periodically, regardless of their effectiveness at searching. Build



obvious hide sites overnight that appear to contain sniper positions or new surveillance positions. Changes such as these might get inside the enemy's decision cycle and forestall an attack.

You will likely inherit an existing base access policy. Be sure to become intimately familiar with the policy and to enforce it ruthlessly. Develop it as necessary to support your mission. Critical to the policy will be stating who has access to the base, when, for how long and with what privileges. The policy needs to include mechanisms for tracking all personnel that are given access, to include foreign-country nationals, local nationals, contractors and field-support representatives and technicians, as well as visiting U.S. Soldiers and government agency personnel.

Re-badge every badge holder on the FOB. Consider it an initial census. You will discover deficiencies and discrepancies. Our security badges were color-coded according to access and privileges on the FOB. For example, machine operators were given a purple badge and authorized specific privileges, while day laborers and dining facility workers were given red badges and required U.S. escorts to move around the FOB.

The vetting of certain employees/contractors was more in depth, so we permitted unescorted travel. When specific employees and supervisors demonstrated reliability and independence, and were vetted by counterintelligence, we sometimes upgraded their privileges so they were able to escort other local national workers, have cellphone access and, in some cases, have dining facility privileges.

Continually review contracts and understand that no contracts happen overnight. You must anticipate future needs. As winter approached, we anticipated needing snow removal equipment and salt. This required a seasonal con-



Soldiers train on an 81 mm mortar system.

tract. At one point, our FOB was slated to nearly double its population for a period of time. After analyzing the ratio of personnel to toilets and showers, we knew we would be in trouble if we did not contract additional latrine shower trailers. This, of course, increased the number of contracted waste-removal vehicles and workers, and required additional freshwater holding tanks and trucks.

The key to contracting is relationships—with contractors, supervisors, unit commanders, interpreters, Soldiers in the mayor's cell, Soldiers at the ECP, and good and bad employees. Get to know everyone involved. Soldiers at the ECP will spot anomalies and negative influencers. Interpreters will do the majority of the communicating, so if you want your messages to get through, make sure to build a relationship with your interpreter(s). Strong relationships with both your interpreters and the local-national workers on your FOB will pay dividends in terms of security and gaining local intelligence. In addition, a decent relationship with a contractor—based mostly on the prompt processing of his payments—can ward off trouble.

Do not treat your local-national labor force with disrespect or disdain. The relationship you build (or, more specifically, the relationship that the mayor builds) with them will have a direct impact on operations in the vicinity of your FOB.

In our case, the young leader of our labor force was actually the son of an elder who owned the land that our FOB resided on. This allowed the landowners to keep tabs on their land, but it also allowed us to build rapport with the locals. When a very serious escalation of force incident occurred near the FOB, the family involved recognized our relationship with the landowners and knew our unit's integrity was unquestionable. They proved to be very understanding because of this. Once you have earned the respect of the

local-national laborers, they will do astounding amounts of manual labor to accomplish the continuous improvements to the FOB and its defenses and facilities. Identify and utilize any special skills in your laborers. There may be carpenters, painters, welders and even mechanics in their ranks. Accept the fact that some of them are collecting information on the FOB.

Continue to invite assessment. This can be from central command, your regional command, your brigade and even adjacent units. Utilize the assessment outcomes and recommendations as necessary and leverage the assessments for additional assets, equipment and necessary contracts. FOB management isn't sexy, but when done well, it protects the force and enables combat operations.

Contributing to this article were other members of the Red Currahee FOB Gardez management team: Sgt. Jesse Deel, 1st Lt. Thomas Frain, 1st Lt. Patrick Kelly, Staff Sgt. Shaun Reightler, Staff Sgt. Adam Seals, 1st Sgt. Kenneth Townsend and 1st Lt. Frances Williams.

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